

National Space Symposium - A Unique Opportunity for Our Industry

Written by Bernie McShea

Wednesday, 21 April 2010 19:42 -

The annual National Space Symposium is a one-of-a-kind event that we at Space Florida eagerly await every spring. Drawing together several thousand senior-level attendees from across the space industry every March or April in Colorado Springs - it is one of the best venues for accomplishing a great deal within a handful of days. Indeed, in my 15 years of economic development work, it is one of the best conferences, in any industry, at drawing very senior executives to a single venue.

Even as Space Florida has changed its approach to NSS over the past two years – focusing on private meetings to advance business development opportunities in lieu of a presence on the tradeshow floor – we still invest literally hundreds of staff hours in preparing for this most critical event!

Between Frank DiBello and I, we had more than 10 meetings with companies across the space enterprise – ranging from large industry players to smaller enterprises looking to “break-into” NASA’s new focus on commercial space (moreover, this was all packed into two days – Wednesday was a race back to Florida for President Obama’s April 15 speech at KSC). While the contents of these meetings cannot be made public (we are under Non-Disclosure Agreements with each of these companies), each one was very productive in that we discussed how Space Florida can support and enhance – be it through financing, facilities, workforce assistance, or other means – their creation of jobs in Florida.

Overall, a dominant theme of the conference was “how can my company prosper in the new commercial space realm?” While much of the immediate attention is focused on NASA, there also is some very good thinking underway as to how to apply more of a commercial approach to national security space procurements. The merits of the Obama Administration’s plan to use commercial carriers for access to Low Earth Orbit were robustly debated at the “NASA – The Budget and the Way Ahead” panel on which Frank DiBello participated. Judging by audience reaction, there still is a healthy amount of skepticism as to whether this the best course for NASA.

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Prior to heading out on Wednesday, I was able to attend Pratt & Whitney/Rocketdyne's Power Breakfast with their President, Jim Maser. Jim's presentation is always thought provoking and this year was no exception, with significant focus on PWR's efforts to utilize its decades-long expertise in combustion technology in diversifying into next generation applications for cleaner and more efficient energy generation.

It was a very relevant note on which to end the conference, as Space Florida works to diversify Florida's space industry base among 10 market segments that utilize and depend upon the technologies and enabling capabilities of space.